

Election 'Arrangement' in Vietnam Was Disclosed a Decade Ago

While the classic battle for Americans to know what their government is doing was being waged—the government v. The New York Times—the Justice Department sought to stop the Washington Post from printing its reports on what went on in Vietnam during the Eisenhower years.

The Post pieces are echoes. Read, for example, Edgar Snow's "The Other Side of the River," published 10 years ago. Snow's chapter seven, "War and Peace in Vietnam," recounts the break-up of the Geneva conference, State Secretary John Foster Dulles' rush off to Saigon to arrange for the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, and subsequent "postponement of the elections."

A part of the cease-fire terms, ending the French rule in Vietnam, was an exchange of residents under supervision and free elections. The charge was made at the time, probably with a good deal of truth, that the north sent thousands of people southward to stack the elections. At any rate, Snow wrote: "It shortly became apparent that the electoral arrangements were to be sabotaged, however, by a de facto United States military alliance with Ngo Dinh Diem, an ex-royalist violently opposed to unification with the D.R.V. (Democratic Republic of Vietnam). . . ."

"Using SEATO as a facade (but without any authorization from other members to do so) Mr. Dulles' envoys urged military assistance on both Cambodia and Laos. Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia quickly halted the infiltration and reasserted his complete neutrality, after he discovered the inten-

tions of Central Intelligence Agency operatives functioning under the direction of John Foster Dulles' brother Allen. (So did Burma.) . . ."

Again, Snow writes: "After United States intervention in South Vietnam and repudiation of the election agreement in 1956, the international commission (Poland, Canada, India) dissolved itself in disgust."

Pentagon papers seem to confirm Snow's decade-old views, for which he was roundly criticized at the time. Eisenhower was candid enough to concede that the North would have won the election at that time. Rationale was that we were battling spreading communism.

Time has shown that far too many political-diplomatic decisions in the embryonic days of the war were not what the public assumed them to be, based on official policy statements. That's what the furore is about now, though it's puzzling to understand the Nixon administration's edgy concern about the disclosures from official sources. Our hope is that this dose of unvarnished truth will do some good.

CPYRGHT